

Norfolk Brecks: Goshawks & Hawfinches (2)

Mon 5th-Thurs 8th March 2012



Trip photos (clockwise from top): Oozing charisma, we saw this pair of Kingfishers along the Little Ouse • The group enjoy the sun as they watch for Goshawks at a traditional Breckland location • A nice group of Reed Buntings at the feeders at Lackford Lakes • A perky Marsh Tit was seen well at Lackford Lakes © tour leader Gary Elton/Limosa Holidays

**report compiled by tour leader:
Gary Elton**

Trip Diary

Tour Leader: Gary Elton

with Tony Charles, Dave Johnson, Colin Leggat, John & Jane Nicholson, Johnnie Powell, and Darrell & Val Sutton

Mon 5th March

After a very enjoyable evening meal and an opportunity to get to know each other and discuss the trip, we retired to bed full of expectations for the days ahead.

Tue 6th March

After the previous day's atrocious weather, it was with some relief that we awoke to a cloudy, but at least dry day. After breakfast, we made the short trip to nearby Santon Downham. Our starting point was at St Helens car park, where on driving in we immediately flushed a small number of Chaffinches and Bramblings from the car park floor.

We disembarked from the minibus and enjoyed good views of the Bramblings, with several cracking males already sporting a large percentage of their impressive spring finery. A small flock of Redwings was also admired nearby, before we moved on to view the clear-fell area at the back of the car park, hoping to see the Great Grey Shrike that has been spending the latter part of the winter there. The shrike was quickly located, perched on a nearby tree top enabling good views to be gained by everyone. At one stage it was joined by a Great Spotted Woodpecker, which led to an interesting confrontation. A singing Wood Lark was also located above us and a male Yellowhammer was found perched high in a nearby conifer.

We then drove back towards the village, stopping to listen for Firecrests, with one having been seen in the area the week before. Our second stop was successful with a singing bird located and seen by everyone, followed by nice views of a nearby Treecreeper. Whilst searching for the Firecrest, we heard a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker drumming twice along the tree lined river, so we decided to change our plans and search for it. Unfortunately, the bird did not drum again and searching proved fruitless, but a pair of Kingfishers found by 'eagle-eyed Dave' perched in some low vegetation, and were nice consolation.

Following a quick cuppa, we drove onto our next destination, Lakenheath RSPB reserve, stopping to search for Little Owl at a traditional breeding site along the way. A bird was quickly found but disappeared quickly from view allowing only two of the group to see it. Arriving at the reserve, we had lunch then walked up to view the fen from the nearby viewpoint, noting a Curlew and a small group of Meadow Pipits and Pied Wagtails in a small flooded field by the path along the way. Two Little Egrets flew across the back of the fen, quickly disappearing from view, though a pair of Pintail on the fen itself were more co-operative. A flock of c.40 finches in trees by the visitors centre were mainly Siskins, though two Lesser Redpolls, including a rose-flushed male, were found amongst them. We then made the mile or so walk out to the furthest watchpoint overlooking the main reed bed. Highlights here included two Common Cranes flying across the back of the reed bed and a Barn Owl, the three birds appearing all together at one stage in the same scope view.

With the weather now having improved considerably, we walked further along the river bank, which gave a lucky few views of several noisy Bearded Tits in the path side reeds, though the birds were moving along the wide channels that run through the reeds, making them frustratingly difficult to see.

We walked back to the minibus along the river, stopping again on the way back to the hotel to look for the Little Owl; unfortunately, there was no sign of it, though a small group of Fieldfares and Redwings in the same field looked rather smart in the afternoon sun.

Wed 7th March

With a wet start to the day, our first stop after breakfast was to take advantage of the hide at Lynford Water, a reclaimed gravel pit positioned adjacent to the nearby arboretum. Thirty or so Tufted Ducks were on the centre of the water when we arrived, with a single Pochard found in amongst them, though a smart drake Goosander nearby them very much stole the show.

With rain still falling, we moved onto our next venue, the Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve at Lackford Lakes, stopping along the way to view a pair of Grey Partridge in a roadside field. On arrival we spent ten minutes sat in the dry viewing the feeders set up outside the back of the visitor centre. At least ten Lesser Redpolls were fighting over the niger feeder, with at least two rosy red males in amongst them, and the adjacent feeder was full of Reed Buntings, with nine counted on there at one stage.

We spent the next hour or so walking around the reserve, adding birds that included Bullfinch, Snipe (two), Goldeneye (12), Shelduck (three), Red-crested Pochard (found by Tony) and Goosander to the day list. Returning back to the centre, we viewed the feeders enjoying nice views of Marsh and Long-tailed Tits, before continuing our journey onto nearby Cavenham Heath for lunch. Our attentions were once again distracted *en route*, with a large flock of colourful Fieldfares and Redwings noted in a roadside field that definitely warranted a stop. Lunch was eaten in the minibus sheltering from yet another shower, after which we drove along the main track searching the neighbouring heath for an early returning Stone Curlew. Our luck was in with our second scan of the heath producing a rather damp Stone Curlew tucked in amongst the heather, and a bonus in the form of a pair of Stonechat, found perched on the nearby track fencing.

With the rain finally starting to ease, we headed to our final destination of the day - Lynford Arboretum. We parked and walked through the Arboretum, where we stumbled on a singing Firecrest, which appeared in front of us, allowing us good views. As we walked down to the paddock area several Goldcrests were seen and heard, as well as two Marsh Tits and several fly-over calling Crossbills. After searching the area of Hornbeams in front of us, we had nearly given up finding our target species, Hawfinch, then we realised two nearby birders were staring intently at some trees further along, and as we approached they informed us there was indeed a bird under the trees there. Unfortunately, only Dave managed to glimpse the bird as it flew off, though a search along the tops of the nearby conifers revealed another bird sat in full view. This bird only stayed for a few seconds, but as luck would have it a second bird was found perched out in the open a short distance further along; this bird stayed in full view for several minutes affording us all good looks at it! Flushed with success we returned to the minibus adding views of another Marsh Tit, Coal Tit and more fly-over Crossbills to the day's tally before returning to the hotel.

Thurs 8th March

It was with some relief to wake this morning and find a glorious sunny day with lots of blue sky, and after breakfast we headed off to search for Goshawk, the other main 'target species' of the trip. This involved a short drive then a mile or so walk through the forest, with the walk itself producing excellent views of a pair of Crossbills, a species we had recorded over the past two days but all of birds flying over. We reached the watchpoint to be met almost immediately by the first views of a Goshawk, brief but fortunately seen by all. Over the next hour and a half we were to have a further five sightings of Goshawks, the last being of two birds with a least one Sparrowhawk in the area for comparison. Singing Wood Lark were an additional bonus with two singing birds there, with one song-fighting right over us.

We returned to the bus for a well-earned cup of tea, before moving on to our final destination of the trip a return visit to the arboretum, hoping for better views of Hawfinch. After parking, we walked through the Arboretum, again hearing Firecrest and, again, getting nice views of it (you can never see too many Firecrests!). We walked down to the area where we had seen the birds the day before, where we had our lunch whilst we scanned the trees for birds. Sadly, searching proved fruitless, with the flock having spent the majority of the latter part of the winter in this favoured area, it is probably safe to assume food was starting to run out. A nice female Crossbill was found by Jane, perched in

full view at the top of one of the taller conifers. which afforded us good 'scope views, and a second singing Firecrest was also noted.

With time drawing on, we walked back to the bus, seeing Little Grebe on the lake and Marsh Tit and Nuthatch on one of the feeding areas that have been erected near the car park. Finally, we returned to the hotel, where we said our goodbyes and started our journeys home, after a very enjoyable three days birding.

Gary Elton

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED

(Total number of species recorded: 94)

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

Small numbers were noted in roadside fields on the first two days.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

Two were seen well in a roadside field *en route* to Lackford Lakes.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Noted daily.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Recorded at Lakenheath and Lackford Lakes.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

Noted at Lakenheath (25), Lackford Lakes (eight) and Lynford (four).

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Recorded daily with a maximum of 40 at Lakenheath RSPB

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Seen at Lakenheath RSPB and Lackford Lakes, with c40 birds feeding a roadside field near the entrance of the latter site.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Three at Lackford Lakes were the only ones seen.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Noted at Lakenheath Fen (c.30), Lackford Lakes(c.20) and Lynford Water (four).

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common, seen daily.

Wigeon *Anas penelope*

c.30 were seen in flight at Lakenheath RSPB.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

At least ten birds were seen at both Lakenheath Fen and Lackford Lakes.

Pintail *Anas acuta*

A pair were seen at Lakenheath Fen and a female at Lackford Lakes.

Teal *Anas crecca*

Small numbers of birds were noted at all wetland sites visited.

Pochard *Aythya ferina*

A single bird was noted in amongst Tufted Duck at Lynford Water, with c.30 seen at Lackford Lakes.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

A female was found by Tony at Lackford Lakes.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Noted at all wetland sites.

Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

A dozen including six males were seen at Lackford Lakes.

Goosander *Mergus merganser*

A splendid drake was a nice find at Lynford Water, with a redhead seen in flight at Lackford Lakes

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*.

A vocal bird on Lynford lake was seen on both visits.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Noted at Lakenheath Fen (six) and Lynford Water (two).

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Two at Lakenheath RSPB and one at Lackford Lakes were the only one seen.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Two were seen briefly in flight at Lakenheath Fen.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Noted at Lakenheath RSPB and Lackford Lakes.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Seen daily at various sites.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

At least four were noted at Lakenheath RSPB .

Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

Once again good prolonged views were had, with birds seen on six occasions on our last morning.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Three sightings of a male at Lackford Lakes, was followed by two displaying birds at Lynford Arboretum and two more whilst watching for Goshawks.

Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Two were seen at Weeting Heath and Lynford Arboretum.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

Heard squealing at Lakenheath RSPB.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Recorded daily.

Coot *Fulica atra*

Noted at all wetland sites.

Common Crane *grus grus*

Two were seen well in flight from the watchpoint at Lakenheath RSPB.

Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

A single bird at Cavenham Heath was a nice surprise.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Birds were noted daily.

Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Five in flight at Lakenheath RSPB, were followed by good views of two outside the first hide at Lackford Lakes.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

One was found feeding in a cattle field at Lakenheath RSPB, with three others flying over us the next day at Cavenham Heath.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Common, easily seen each day.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

One and two s were noted on the first two days.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Single 2nd and 3rd winter birds were seen on the tern raft at Lackford Lakes.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Three were noted at Lakenheath Fen, with c.30 over Santon Downham the following day.

Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Noted daily.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Noted daily in small numbers.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

Noted daily and easily seen.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Easily seen around suburban areas.

Barn Owl *Tyto Alba*

One seen well by the group at Lakenheath RSPB, was followed by a second seen later by Dave at the same site.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

Unfortunately, a brief view for two of the group of a single bird near Lakenheath.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Two found by Dave perched in low vegetation along the banks of the Little Ouse were a good find.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*

Frustratingly, only heard at Santon Downham.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Recorded daily at a variety of sites.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

As above, though more often heard than seen.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

The wintering bird near Stanton Downham was again seen well by the group.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Two at Santon Downham were the only ones seen.

Magpie *Pica pica*

Recorded daily in small numbers.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

Common and easily seen.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Noted daily in good numbers.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

Seen daily.

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*

A single bird was seen well at Lackford Lakes, with up to three seen on both visits to Lynford Arboretum.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Heard at all suitable sites with several seen well at Lynford Arboretum.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Recorded daily.

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Recorded daily.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Seen at Stanton Downham, Lackford Lakes and Lynford Arboretum.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Seen and heard daily.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

Singing individuals were seen well on our first and last days.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

At least four individuals were heard at Lakenheath RSPB reserve, with one briefly seen.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

At least 6 were heard, and several seen at Lakenheath RSPB.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*

Singles were seen well at Santon Downham and Lynford Arboretum.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Heard daily with several seen well at Lynford Arboretum.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Seen and heard daily.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Heard and seen at a variety of woodland sites.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Heard at several sites, with a singing bird seen well at Santon Downham.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Common, noted daily.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Seen daily.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

50+ birds were noted in several mixed Redwing/Fieldfare flocks at Lakenheath, Lackford and Cavenham Heath.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

As above with similar numbers noted, plus 20+ at Santon Downham.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Noted daily at various sites.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

One or two birds were seen daily.

Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

A pair were seen well on the roadside fencing at Cavenham Heath.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Common, seen daily.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Noted daily around suburban areas.

Duncock *Prunella modularis*

Recorded daily.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Six were noted in a cattle field at Lakenheath RSPB, with another noted at Lynford Arboretum.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Noted in the same cattle field as the Pied Wagtails, with several others noted at Cavenham Heath.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Seen daily.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

Seen well at Santon Downham, with the small flock containing several bright males.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Seen daily.

Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

Seen and heard daily throughout the forest.

Lesser Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*

Seen well on the feeders at Lackford Lakes, with others noted at Lakenheath RSPB and in flight over our hotel.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Seen daily at various sites.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

Three at Lakenheath RSPB were the only ones recorded.

Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

Recorded daily at various sites, with nice views eventually had of both male and female birds.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

One heard calling at Lackford Lakes was finally seen, though only in flight.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

One briefly glimpsed by Dave, was followed by two more confiding individuals.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*

Several were seen and heard during the trip.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Easily seen at Lackford Lakes and Lakenheath RSPB.

MAMMALS

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

European Hare *Lepus europaeus*

Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi*

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*